

## Letter from Frederick W. Baldwin to Alexander Graham Bell, July 28, 1907, with transcript

Copy of a letter written by F. W. Baldwin commenting upon the proposition of Dr. Bell to form an organization (later known as the American Experimental Association) to aid in promoting the Art of Aviation. Read Monday Evening, July 29, 1907. Sunday, July 28th 1907 Dear Mr. Bell:

You have asked for our views on the question of forming an Aerial Experiment Association and I presume you meant them with the same random that you have expressed some of yours.

In the first place the whole scheme as outlined by you appealed to me very much. Not because I thought it was simply a chance to help reap the harvest of other men's work, or be in at the death without going the course, but because it seemed to me a better working arrangement and better able to cope with the difficulties which are still ahead.

Now without taking your last dictation too seriously or too literally, still it is obvious that you have entirely mistaken the attitude of "these young men who wish to come in as equals when they have contributed nothing to the success of the scheme." Even random thought (which I am afraid may not always be so charitably classed) it hits hard right at the vitals of the machine. If you still entertain this thought seriously, by all means give the whole scheme up. The moment selfish interests become involved the game is up. It was your idea to give us an interest in anything that might result and I for one never saw any necessity of bringing that side of the question into it at all. By the time there are money interests mixed up with the venture a commercial concern will be ready to take it up and then if any of us have rendered any service worthy of remuneration it is yours to give not ours to demand. In the mean time let money matters be absolutely out of the question as

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far as we are concerned 2 (although possibly some other arrangement might be necessary in Mr. Curtiss' case.)

Another point upon which I am afraid you mistook our motives was in dealing with your assistants. By all means reward every man woman and child according to his worth. But surely this is a secondary consideration. What we want is a smooth working machine that will accomplish something. If the mechanism of representing all who have worked or contributed anything in previous experiments, would not be too complicated. I'm sure no one has the least objection to it. But I am inclined to think it might clog rather than help matters.

The really important thing to my mind is to keep Mr. Curtiss. If you can get him under any other arrangement no great harm has been done. The other important point is in my opinion is that if you can get him he should have some authority, not a mere nominal position. If he is to be fettered by being placed in an anomalous position his almost invaluable experience will go for very little.

If the goal of all your years of work on this subject is to fly reasonably soon, my one word of advice, (if such it can be called without presumption) is to keep Curtiss by hook or by crook. He fills a much needed gap to perfection and without such a man I really feel that we are likely to be still on the threshold of success while many others will have flown and be well on with improvements of their infinitely cruder constructions.

As for the view you fear the public might take of such an association. I think it is most unlikely and doubt if it would occur to anyone but yourself. With your world-wide reputation it is far more likely that anyone who helped 3 you would be forgotten entirely rather than given too much credit.

As for the general application of the tetrahedral principle it seems to me that in the construction of aerial vehicles it has its first field and most obvious advantages.

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I see no reason why you should fear the formation of such an association or why you cannot control it. Without alliance with some such man as Mr. Curtiss I fear your years of experiment, valuable data and fertility of ideas may be almost wasted or at least delayed in their fruition until others have done the same thing. On the other hand with such a happy combination of talents each strong in the others weak points, the chances of early and great success look big and the equitable division of spoils, honour and glory a very small thing too.

Yours sincerely, F. W. Baldwin